

# INQUIRY TO DETERMINE BLAME FOR COLLAPSE TO BE MADE AT ONCE

## Tragedy's Direct Cause Cannot Be Known Without Thorough Probe, Say Officials

### CITY'S STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ORDERED TO MAKE REPORT

#### Commissioners and Inspector at Scene of Wreck—Rescues Precede Inquiry—

#### To Clear Wooden Bridges

At noon today, Commissioner Rudolph said that an investigation of the disaster would be called by the building inspector. The commissioner said that all theaters having this type of roof, which is known as the cantilever roof, will be ordered to remain closed until the building inspector can see to it that the snow is removed and, afterward, can see if the roof has been weakened in any way by the weight of the snow.

Investigation into the collapse of the Knickerbocker Theater roof will be started at once, Commissioner Cuno H. Rudolph, chairman of the board of District Commissioners, stated today. Until a thorough investigation is made the direct cause of the tragedy will not be determined, officials stated. "No man can tell at the present time just what was directly responsible for the collapse of the roof," declared Building Inspector Healy.

Col. Charles Keller, engineer commissioner, who supervises the building inspector's office, was at the scene of the catastrophe all night, gathering first hand information.

District Commissioner James F. Oyster, joined with Commissioner Rudolph in announcing plans for an investigation. Commissioner Oyster went to the ruins of the theater shortly before noon to confer, he said, with Col. Keller about having the various wooden bridges, such as the Aqueduct and Calvert street structures, cleared of snow as soon as possible. Possibility of these bridges, several of which have been condemned, collapsing under the weight of snow was pointed out.

"You may rest assured that the Commissioner will see to it that a thorough and complete investigation of this unfortunate occurrence is made," said Commissioner Oyster today. "It is too early, he explained, to endeavor to carry out any systematic probe in view of the efforts which must be made to rescue the victims."

**Structural Experts On Duty.** "I have just ordered R. H. Davis and R. L. Lewis, structural engineers of my office, to go to the scene at once and report to Maj. Cary H. Brown, assistant engineer commissioner, who has taken charge," Mr. Healy said.

The building inspector estimated that the snow on the roof was about two feet deep, with weight of between 20 and 25 pounds to the square foot. He explained that the weight might have been greater on certain parts of the roof where the snow had blown into drifts.

This weight, he said, was not as great as it would have been today or tomorrow, when the snow would have thawed and become water-soaked.

**At Theater All Night.** Mr. Healy was asked if he had reached any definite conclusion as to what structural supports had given way, replying as quoted above. Mr. Healy was at the theater all night, but said he was thinking more of how to get the pinned-in men, women and children out of the wreckage than he was thinking of the cause of the collapse.

The building inspector could not recall a previous case of the collapse of a building in the District of Columbia directly as a result of the weight of snow on the roof. Small shacks have gone down under heavy snows, he said.

**MANY AMAZING ESCAPES;  
PITIFUL SEARCHES MADE**

#### Parents Frantically Inquire for Children—Little Girl Found Uninjured; Mother Dead—Hundreds on Scene All Night.

As in all catastrophes, there were many miraculous escapes last night at the Knickerbocker. And there are many who have cause today to be thankful that for some reason which seemed trivial at the time, they changed intentions of going to the Knickerbocker.

Men and women who were rescued, tell of how they sat in the balcony, or in the pit below—how a chance glance at the ceiling above showed the roof parting, followed by a terrific hiss and the crash of falling tons of brick and mortar—how, when they recovered consciousness, they found themselves lying under twisted iron girders—untouched, save for a bruise or scratch.

**Parents Search for Children.** One of the most pathetic scenes about the ruins was the search of a father, or mother, for a missing boy or girl who had "gone to the movies."

Some of them, before the lines of police and soldiers were drawn up around the ruins, had managed to get to the pile of debris. Calling, calling hopefully the name of a loved one, they stumbled about over the wreck; heeding, then passing on, as some voice pleading for help came from beneath the wreckage.

Then the women—the mothers, who gathered outside the lines after they were formed. Pleading with agonized voices to be let inside the lines—they were kept out, a necessity in this case to protect life from the standing wall, expected to capsize any minute.

Telephone calls to The Star office, after news of the catastrophe had spread, were pitiful. One of them, a plaintiff, childish voice, said that "Mama and papa went to the movies tonight. Were they hurt?"

Another, from a nurse, said four little children were waiting the return of their parents, who had gone to the theater. Endless questions reached The Star concerning the names of dead and injured. A name would be given, searched for in the first lists received from the scene, and many times the tragic news of a terrible death was broken.

Then there were those who were separated in the accident from those with whom they had gone to the theater. A husband, recovering consciousness, was taken out of the ruins, only to return to look for his wife, who had been sitting beside him. A little child, who had been drawn by the theater earlier in the evening, after hours of anguish, in which he saw the mangled dead taken

# AMONG VICTIMS OF THEATER DISASTER



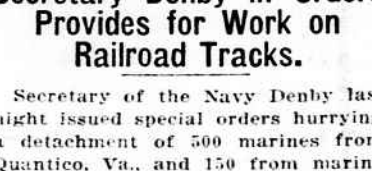
MISS HELENA BARCHFELD  
Former Representative from Pennsylvania.



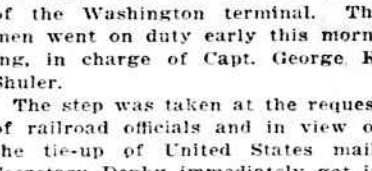
CHARLES COLES TUCKER



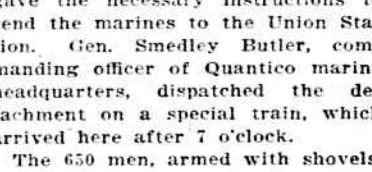
A. J. BARCHFELD  
Former Representative from Pennsylvania.



L. W. STRAYER



MISS HELENA BARCHFELD



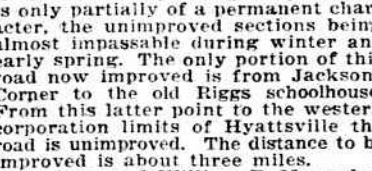
CHARLES COLES TUCKER



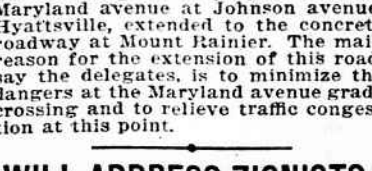
A. J. BARCHFELD



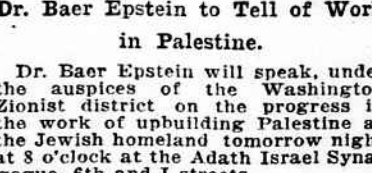
L. W. STRAYER



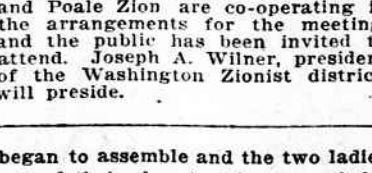
MISS HELENA BARCHFELD



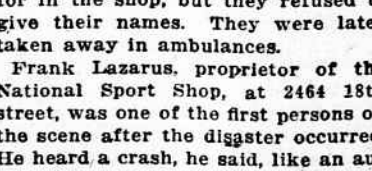
CHARLES COLES TUCKER



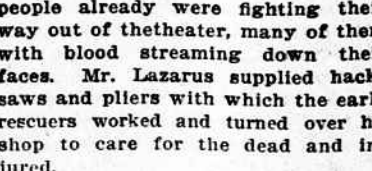
A. J. BARCHFELD



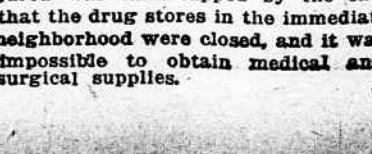
L. W. STRAYER



MISS HELENA BARCHFELD



CHARLES COLES TUCKER



A. J. BARCHFELD

# RECEPTION IS POSTPONED.

## Party for Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge Put Off Because of Theater Horror.

The reception which was to have been given to the Vice President and Mrs. Coolidge tomorrow night at the Congressional Club has been called off on account of the Knickerbocker Theater disaster. Mrs. Harry Woodard, chairman of the entertainment committee, has announced.

"We are stunned by this catastrophe," she stated.

"The Knickerbocker was the prize of our circuit, constructed at no limit of cost, before the war, when the best materials and engineering brains were secured to make this house a model of theater architecture and construction. The structure was subjected to and passed every municipal and government inspection and test.

"We cannot find words to express the depths of sympathy we feel for those bereaved by this appalling catastrophe.

"We would infinitely rather have abandoned all our enterprises than that a single life should have been lost or any individual maimed or injured."

"(Signed) HARRY M. CRANDALL, president, A. R. C. ZETA, secretary, and BARRY BUCKLEY, secretary."

**TROOPS RENDER  
SPLENDID SERVICE**

#### Police and Firemen Also Quick to Arrive at the Scene of Knickerbocker Horror.

Assisting virtually all night long in the relief work were more than 250 soldiers and marines, sent to the scene by the special order of Brig. Gen. H. H. Bandholz, of the army, commanding the district of Washington, and Maj. Gen. Lejeune, head of the marine corps.

There were 150 cavalrymen from Fort Myer, Va., dispatched to the theater under the supervision of Maj. Harry Cope, adjutant of the district of Washington. He was relieved early this morning by Maj. C. P. George, of Fort Myer, who, in turn, was relieved shortly before noon by Maj. Patton, also of Fort Myer. Gen. Bandholz said that it was not his intention to send more troops, as the number engaged in the work of rescue at present is adequate.

The army, he declared, was anxious to help in every way possible. "About 100 more marines joined with the soldiers in aiding in the rescue activities today. Some of the marines were from the marine barracks and some from the navy yard. Lieut. Col. Khea, of the navy yard, in charge, assisted by Maj. Vogel, commanding officer of the marine barracks, who stayed on duty all night, and First Lieut. M. V. Parsons.

**Police Act Quickly.** Lieut. C. L. Plimmons, night chief of detectives, was on duty at police headquarters, when the first call for the fire department was received from the alarm box at 15th street and Columbia road at 9:10 o'clock. Upon receipt of the alarm, the lieutenant learned of the seriousness of the disaster and got busy on the police wires to have police of several precincts in readiness for emergency work.

Exactly thirteen minutes after the first alarm was received a second alarm was sounded, summoning six additional companies of firemen to the scene, and at 9:40 o'clock the sounding of a fourth alarm brought five more companies to the scene. A fifth alarm was sounded, six more companies responding to aid in the rescue work, making a total of twenty engine companies, six trucks, a water tower and fourteen fuel wagons scheduled to respond.

**Marines Offer Services.** Shortly after the sounding of the fifth alarm Lieut. Plimmons received an offer of the services of the marines stationed at the Pan-American building, where the conference on the limitation of arms is being held. The offer was promptly accepted.

Because of the seriousness of the tragedy calls were sent to practically all hospitals in the city for ambulances and physicians and to every police station for patrol wagons and fire engines.

Much difficulty was experienced by both the firemen and police in their efforts to reach the scene. Seven pieces of fire apparatus and one police patrol wagon were reported disabled en route to the theater. The fire engines, which were stuck in the mud, were unable to get out of the street. The police patrol wagons, which were stuck in the mud, were unable to get out of the street.

**Hundreds of Anxious Inquiries.** Telephone lines leading to police headquarters and places of business in the vicinity of the theater were jammed. Relatives and friends of persons thought to have attended the performance making anxious inquiries as to the identity of injured persons. In many other instances inquiries were made by persons, members of whose families had not returned home, the delay causing anxiety. It was not until late in the night that hospital attendants were able to give names and addresses.

Detectives Sweeney and Messer, on duty at police headquarters, were bent to the task by the thousands of men, but the department was without means of transportation for them. Police officials realized what it meant to be without automobiles in this period of stress. Only necessary calls should be made, it is urged, for the volume of business classed as necessary in connection with the disaster taxes the facilities of the exchanges.

**Chief Operator on Job.** The chief operator, meantime, getting in touch with a telephone near the theater, ascertained from time to time what was needed, and notified the surgeons of all the city hospitals of the catastrophe.

The telephone company then utilized its big fleet of trucks, which had been engaged in transporting the operators to and from the exchanges, to dispatch a force of workmen to the scene. These men included machinists skilled in the use of acetylene torches, tools and just the kind of work they were called upon to perform.

Traffic conditions in the telephone exchanges became indescribable as the night wore on. Thousands of residents, frantic to hear from relatives, used the wire. The operators had already had the most trying day in the history of the telephone company, but refused to leave their switchboards.

**Worse Conditions Today.** Conditions were worse today and an unprecedented volume of long distance calls aggravated them. People in other cities, reading the bulletins of the calamity in the morning papers, sought to get in communication with friends here. Never was there such an immense amount of long distance calls.

Charles T. Clagett, division manager of the company, has issued an urgent appeal to citizens to refrain from using the telephone needlessly in this period of stress. Only necessary calls should be made, it is urged, for the volume of business classed as necessary in connection with the disaster taxes the facilities of the exchanges.

**COVERED BODY OF ONE OF THE DEAD**



COVERED BODY OF ONE OF THE DEAD

# KNICKERBOCKER'S DIRECTORS

## VOICE GRIEF OVER DISASTER

### Issue Statement Expressing Amazement That Building Collapsed—District Officials to Start Inquiry at Once.

The board of directors of the Knickerbocker Theater assembled at 1 o'clock this morning at the home of Harry M. Crandall and issued the following statement:

"We are stunned by this catastrophe," she stated.

"The Knickerbocker was the prize of our circuit, constructed at no limit of cost, before the war, when the best materials and engineering brains were secured to make this house a model of theater architecture and construction. The structure was subjected to and passed every municipal and government inspection and test.

"We cannot find words to express the depths of sympathy we feel for those bereaved by this appalling catastrophe.

"We would infinitely rather have abandoned all our enterprises than that a single life should have been lost or any individual maimed or injured."

"(Signed) HARRY M. CRANDALL, president, A. R. C. ZETA, secretary, and BARRY BUCKLEY, secretary."

**APPEAL MADE TO FEED BIRDS  
AS SNOW BRINGS SUFFERING**

"Well, now, we are up against it, old topper. What will we do now?" "Right! We bighters stick by the city while the birds are winging it south and now there's nothing to eat. Beatty, say I, old dear, I'm winging it now to see if I can find some bread crumbs or something. "Chorus."

This is the translated conversation between two English-American patriots who were discussing weather topics this morning.

With Washington literally snowed out, the birds are winging it south and now there's nothing to eat. Beatty, say I, old dear, I'm winging it now to see if I can find some bread crumbs or something. "Chorus."

**Time to Feed the Birds.** Now is the time for bird lovers to put up their bird's lunch for the birds. In other words, "feed the birds." Past experiences of many in the line of humane work have shown the pleasure to be gained from the society of the friendly little creatures, amply repaid for the little care thus given to them.

Those who live out of town have, it is true, the opportunity of this kind of philanthropy for the Washington suburbs still have, regardless of the cold north winds, a number of the feathered friends of the woodcock, an occasional robin, red-winged blackbird and the busy woodpecker and other birds of bird life too numerous to mention.

**LEADERSHIP LACK  
HOLDS RUSSIA BACK**

#### Necessity for Inducing Refugees to Return Seen by Bolsheviks.

By the Associated Press. MOSCOW, January 28.—Russia's lack of constructive leadership for industrial and commercial reconstruction becomes more apparent every day, and the necessity for inducing refugees to return is clearer to the bolsheviks, perhaps, than to non-bolsheviks, who have less knowledge of the inefficiency of government departments and the difficulties the communists have behind them.

Premier Lenin has repeatedly stressed the desirability of attracting back to Russia the 10,000,000 Russians who have fled to other countries and represent the cream of Russian intelligence. The engineers, scientists, bankers, teachers and merchants are greatly needed.

Let us remember and Lithuanians played a large part in the business life of old Russia. They had enjoyed the benefits of the Russian culture, and many of them are highly trained specialists and managers and directors of various enterprises. Many of them have fled to other countries and taken up residence in the new Baltic states.

**Will Not Re-enter Trade.** Baltic merchants will not re-enter trade in Russia, they lack confidence in the communist government. Manufacturers are unwilling to resume their old work under communist concessions. Even property owners—rather former property owners—are unwilling to take back their apartments, houses and hotels under the proposed concession plan. Consequently the new economic policy is falling far short of expectations.

Free domestic trade is not entirely free. The term is misleading. It is impossible for merchants to ship goods at will on Russian railways. Permits are required to take goods to market. It is difficult to get these. The pilfering on rail lines is extensive. There is no insurance. It is largely through the goods carried by hand that markets in the great cities are supplied. Railway men are paid in kind, and the Ukraine to take out an existence. It brings a better price in Moscow and Petrograd than in the border towns. The cities by railway employees and regular dealers, who employ carriers.

**Movement to the Right.** Lenin's insistence that the government must win the confidence and support of the intelligent classes is generally regarded as a preparation for further movements to the right in governmental policies. Some say it is possible to make them without deserting the communist party utterly.

The communist party is rapidly becoming a party in the sense that the United States and England have parties. Its important leaders show daily signs of making further concessions to the hostile middle class, without, however, giving up the communist principles or half-communist schemes, such as the concession plan of letting factories to old owners.

The building up of the far eastern republic at Chita under bolshevik domination, but with general elections and right of private property, is looked upon as an indication of revised policies which will eventually be adopted in European Russia.

**BURGLAR KILLS PRIEST.** CHICAGO, January 28.—A burglar entered the parish house of the St. Florence Catholic Church and shot to death Rev. Floriano Chodowicz, when the latter started down stairs on hearing a noise made by the burglar. The burglar immediately opened fire and shot down two priests. Several hours later from the wounds received.

**IMPRISONED 7 HOURS, LIVES TO TELL THE TALE**

William Galloway had a miraculous escape from death. Immediately after the crash he found himself pinned down between two seats. With the utmost difficulty he was able to lay his head flat on the floor and breathe; the air seeping through the cracks at that point. He was unable to move. He was brought out slightly hurt at 4 o'clock this morning.

He was seated under the mezzanine tier when he saw the entire mezzanine descending on his head. He quickly threw himself down between two seats. He lay there for seven hours listening while his rescuers searched for him.

**WOULD AMEND ROAD LAW.** Prince Georges County Citizens in Favor of New System. Special Dispatch to The Star. PRINCE GEORGES, Md., January 28.—At a meeting of representatives from each of the nineteen election districts in Prince Georges, held here, it was decided, after considerable discussion, to have a bill introduced in the legislature repealing the present county road law, which provides for six road directors to have charge of the construction and maintenance of the county's highways and bridges.

The fund-raising committee districts would be turned over to these supervisors, who would have authority to employ all labor provide apparatus.

There was a diversity of opinion at the meeting. County Commissioner George W. Water, declaring that it would be unwise to change the present law, and others arguing in favor of the new law, which would provide for a superintendent of roads, who shall be a road engineer. Still others expressed the view that the state should take over all county roads.

Former State's Attorney M. Hampton Magner was appointed to draft a bill to amend the present law. The proposed legislation favored by the meeting.

**ASKS PULPITS TO URGES KINDNESS TO ANIMALS**

Writer Points Out Need of Educating Parents as Well as Children.

To the Editor of The Star: The many friends of the animals would like to thank Mrs. Halstead through The Star for her splendid article of January 21 pertaining to the education of our young people through the public schools in kindness to animals.

I would like to add that the parents could stand a little of it, too.

Then why not have it given out from the pulpit? Surely there could be no more fitting place to preach the gospel of kindness, consideration and knowledge of our obligations to others, and practicing these is surely the foundation of a better life.

Many times have I seen a little child gather in his sheltering arms a homeless kitten and try to bring it to the house, the mother throwing up her hands and raising her voice in protest, telling her child to put it out. When her son grows older and is lacking in chivalry and honor she will wonder why. She would be shocked if she knew that she had killed the budding. So I say, let us educate the parents also in this wonderful study of life.

I would like it to be heard from the pulpits that unless we heed the cry of these helpless creatures, as Jesus ever said to have "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

ELIZABETH CLARK.